

Association of Personal Injury Lawyers
Corporate Accreditation Scheme

Report of a Monitoring Visit to A2 Solicitors LLP
on the 27th June 2014

Summary

A2 Solicitors LLP meet the accreditation criteria for Corporate Membership, subject to the condition specified in the conclusion to this report.

Introduction

We were appointed by APIL to conduct a monitoring visit to A2 Solicitors LLP, a corporate member of the APIL accreditation scheme. The firm is a 2 partner firm in the centre of Rochdale. The offices are relatively new the firm having moved to increase their visibility in the city centre. We are grateful to Paul Ackroyd as Senior Partner and COLP, his partner Christopher Bracey and all their staff for their total cooperation and courtesy during our visit. Both partners are Senior Litigators. Paul has a post graduate diploma in Personal Injury Litigation and undertakes most types of personal injury cases including higher value claims, fatal accidents and general personal injury litigation. Christopher qualified as a solicitor after qualifying as a FILEX. He specialises in employers' and public liability cases. Both partners came together after working in different firms both of which had a considerable personal injury practice. There are 3 other fee earners. The firm has about 800 cases of which about 200 are RTAs. Nearly all the cases are funded by CFAs.

The Monitoring Process

Monitoring is carried out against the seven criteria for APIL Corporate Accreditation. In practice 4 of these are addressed in the course of the visit. Criterion 1 is that the accredited organisation must be a solicitors' practice or an individual office of such a practice. Criterion 2 is that the organisation or office must have at least one individual who is accredited personally as a senior litigator (or higher) and who has personal responsibility and management of PI work.

Compliance with these criteria is established in advance of the visit from APIL and SRA records. A2 Solicitors LLP is a firm of solicitors and Paul Ackroyd and Christopher Bracey are senior litigators.

Criterion 7 requires the firm to undertake to cooperate fully with APIL monitoring, that undertaking had been given and A2 Solicitors LLP complied fully both with the letter and spirit of it.

The remaining criteria concern Client Care, Training and Development, Supervision and Quality Assurance. These are addressed below.

Apart from the discussions with the individuals mentioned above, we inspected their records and Rodger Pannone inspected a sample of client files.

Client Care

The criterion is:-

The accredited organisation or office maintains high standards of client care.

APIL accredited members of the firm undertake to abide by the APIL code of conduct and consumer charter. From our discussions with Paul Ackroyd and Christopher Bracey it clear that this had been done and that all the fee earners were familiar with the requirements. Well over 50% of the cases come in off the street with a further proportion from recommendations. Emma, the receptionist is well trained and "captures" most clients who are then seen by whoever is available. Mr Bracey has an office next to the reception and intervenes if necessary. The firm operates Proclaim and it was clear that Paul Ackroyd has a feel for what is needed to keep abreast of all the files. They operate the

Reliance system to ensure that all SRA and other requirements are covered. There is a 21 day review (see later) and client satisfaction reports.

Inspection of the files confirmed that proper and full instructions are taken, proper advice given on funding and expected progress of cases and advice given throughout the conduct of the litigation.

The files including attendance notes demonstrated that they were capable of continuance by others if necessary. Both Mr Ackroyd and Mr Bracey demonstrated a close and personal interest in looking after their clients effectively and efficiently.

We discussed with the Partners the limitation advice which is offered to a person not accepted as a client. There is no record kept of this advice having been given to those who are turned down without a file being opened. It would be prudent for the firm to keep a record of the names of the enquirer, the date of the enquiry and information that limitation advice had been provided and we so **recommend**. The firm accepted that it would be appropriate to adopt this practice and will consider the best way of doing it.

The criterion is met.

Training and Development

The criterion is:-

The accredited organisation or office ensures that all of its accredited members and other staff are provided with training and development opportunities to enable them to keep up to date, to develop their skills and knowledge, and to meet the needs of clients.

Both partners demonstrated a keenness not only for their own training and development but also for the rest of the staff. They value their Senior Litigation status and we suggested that Mr Ackroyd might consider application as a Fellow. Their training records were up to date.

They value greatly the APIL training in all its forms. They use lectures, webinars and other electronic and paper briefings. As expected there is a close relationship with Counsel who are readily available.

The criterion is met.

Supervision

The criterion is:-

The accredited organisation or office has effective arrangements for the supervision of all lawyers undertaking personal injury work.

The number of fee earners is within the ratio prescribed by APIL for supervision by a Senior Litigator, thus no issues of supervision arise. But see our condition and recommendations under Quality Assurance.

The criterion is met.

Quality Assurance

The criterion is:-

The accredited organisation or office has in place effective arrangements to assure the quality of its legal work.

As stated above the firm uses the Proclaim case management system and Reliance together with further personal individual aids. Mr Ackroyd has a great interest in personalising the system which is effective in generating alerts for key stages and actions.

The partners meet every week to consider risk. Emma opens the mail but it is distributed by one of the partners.

All the team have been together for some time and share any problems and advice. They all know their limitations. However, we felt that consideration should be given to establishing written limits of authority for new entrants which was agreed and would be covered in a revised office manual although we do not make this a formal recommendation.

The arrangements for random file reviews need to be strengthened. At present random file reviews are conducted only by Paul Ackroyd and not surprisingly fall short of the APIL recommended level of one-third of all files being pulled over the course of a year. Also, the current arrangement means that none of Paul Ackroyd's files are subject to random review.

We explained that random file review is not a supervisory function but is to ensure that a reasonable proportion of the cases have the benefit of a second pair of eyes. Given the close working relationship there is no reason why all fee earners should not be involved in this. However this is a matter for the partners. We consider that the firm should put in place arrangements to ensure that the APIL recommended level of random file review is achieved, and that the files of all fee earners are included and consider it should be a **condition** of accreditation that the recommended level be achieved.

Subject to the above condition the criterion is met.

Conclusion:-

A2 Solicitors LLP meets the criteria for corporate accreditation, subject to the following condition being satisfied. Within three months A2 Solicitors LLP should confirm to APIL:-

That arrangements have been made for the random review of all files (including those of Paul Ackroyd) involving the number selected for review over the course of a year being equated to one-third of all active files.

We commend both partners for their caring professionalism.

John Randall
Rodger Pannone